



History

Four years of development went into defining school readiness and creating Georgia's Pre-K Assessment. A large group including prekindergarten directors, teachers, early childhood experts, child advocacy groups, and early childhood professional organizations guided the process.

Supported by a project consultant and Bright from the Start staff, an extensive review and analysis of assessment instruments for four year olds was conducted. A year of work led to the selection of the Work Sampling System (WSS), developed by Dr. Samuel J. Meisels and distributed by Pearson Early Learning, as a core component of Georgia's Pre-K Assessment. WSS best combined a measure of all of the domains within the Georgia Pre-K Content Standards and the guidelines established by the advisory committee. In addition, WSS builds on effective strategies Pre-K teachers in Georgia were already using—portfolio or work sample collection and anecdotal notes documenting their observations of children's performance.

After selecting WSS, Bright from the Start led focus group meetings across the state that included teachers, project directors, site directors, and parents. WSS was piloted in select Pre-K programs around the state during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years. Changes were made to the program based on the pilot program results, and Georgia's Pre-K Assessment was implemented statewide during the 2006-2007 school year.



“All children will start school ready to learn” is the first National Education Goal.¹

This national goal is reflected in the mission of Georgia's Pre-K Program, which is “To provide high quality preschool experiences to prepare children for kindergarten...and life.” More than 700,000 four year olds have been better prepared for kindergarten thanks to Georgia's Pre-K Program, funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education.

School Readiness

Georgia defines school readiness, or how prepared a child is to learn in school, by focusing on the nature of four year olds and how they learn. The definition encompasses families and how they live; communities and the services they provide; and schools and their readiness for children. Each of these factors affects a child's school readiness.

- School readiness – a child is ready for school when
- possible health barriers that block learning have been detected,
 - suspected physical or mental disabilities have been addressed,
 - enthusiasm, curiosity, and persistence toward learning is demonstrated,
 - feelings of self and others are recognized,
 - social and interpersonal skills are emerging,
 - communication with others is effective,
 - early literacy skills are evident,
 - a general knowledge about the world, things, places, events, and people has been acquired.

¹ Established in 1990 by the National Education Goals Panel, an independent executive branch agency of the federal government.



Assessment

Assessment is important. It can provide information for screening children to see if they need intervention, for planning instruction to ensure that the needs of all children are being met, for identifying program improvement and staff development needs, and for evaluating the extent to which programs are meeting children’s needs. Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment, which was implemented statewide in 2006, provides an emerging picture of a child’s readiness for school.

Bright from the Start developed Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment to inform teachers and parents. It is designed to provide information to use for discussion, planning, and designing learning activities to promote growth and development during the prekindergarten year. The assessment helps parents and teachers by indicating areas where children are performing as a typical four year old and areas where children need more development.

Four year olds’ learning is highly influenced by how they feel, what is happening around them, and what their interests are at the moment. They grow and change rapidly. They are easily distracted and have no personal interest in assessment. Therefore, the assessment of four year olds must be on-going, developmentally appropriate, administered cautiously, and broadly interpreted. Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment is designed to provide an album of rich portraits of a child’s performance over time.

The assessment involves observing, recording, and documenting data about children as they interact with the world around them. Teachers accomplish this through a variety of methods including writing anecdotal notes, taking pictures, and selecting children’s work samples.

Georgia’s assessment takes into consideration the whole child including: cognitive and general knowledge development including math, science, and social studies; language and literacy development; social and emotional development including approaches to learning; health and physical development; and creative expression. In addition to Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment, local screening and referral procedures are in place to identify children for health and other services.

The purpose of the assessment is to enable parents and teachers to work together to ensure children’s learning and development.



Five Things Teachers Need to Know About Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment

1. Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment addresses the skills and knowledge identified in Georgia’s Pre-K Content Standards, which Georgia’s Pre-K Program teachers must teach. Georgia’s Pre-K Content Standards identify what four year olds in Georgia should know, understand, and be able to do. Georgia’s Pre-K Content Standards may be taught through a variety of approved curricula.

2. Georgia’s Pre-K Program teachers must assess the performance of all children using Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment. The new statewide assessment was implemented in the 2006-2007 school year. All Georgia Pre-K providers use the new statewide assessment unless they request and are approved for a waiver.

3. Results of Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment are used for two purposes: instructional planning and informing parents and guardians about their child’s performance. In addition assessment results should provide a clear picture of an emerging learner for kindergarten teachers.

4. Assessment is a continuous, on-going process that involves observing and documenting children’s performance as well as collecting student work samples. Georgia’s model uses the Work Sampling System (WSS), a curriculum-embedded assessment. Assessment occurs as teachers observe and record student performance as they engage in the learning activities planned by the teacher. Teachers assess the work completed by students and frequently collect work samples that show growth or provide a clear picture of a child’s performance. With WSS students are not assessed in a one-on-one setting, nor are they asked to complete activities strictly for the purpose of assessing learning. The assessing of children’s learning takes place as teachers and children go about their normal routine.

5. Conferences with parents/guardians must be held a minimum of two times during the year at which time the Georgia Pre-K Progress Report is provided. The Georgia Pre-K Progress Report provides information about the total child including health related and academic information. The report summarizes the level of performance for each child on fifty-five performance indicators under seven domains of classroom learning, which are evaluated using the WSS Developmental Guidelines and Checklist.



Six Things Parents Need to Know About Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment

1. Georgia’s Pre-K Program believes strongly that parents are a child’s first and most important teacher.

2. Georgia’s Pre-K Assessment is not a test. It involves observations and collection of work in the classroom by the teacher as children engage in their normal, routine daily activities.

3. Assessment is an on-going, continuous process throughout the school year. Teachers observe and record student performance every day. They collect samples of student work that show development and growth. This becomes the “data” they use to assess student performance.

4. Results of the assessment are used by the teacher to plan instruction to meet the needs of children and to inform parents about their child’s performance. Teachers use the “data” they have collected about individual students and groups of students to plan instruction to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. They also use the “data” to keep parents informed of their child’s performance. Working together, parents and teachers can better meet the needs of children.

5. Teachers complete a Work Sampling System Developmental Checklist and a Georgia Pre-K Progress Report for each child. Teachers use the “data” they have collected about each student to complete a Work Sampling System Developmental Checklist, which includes fifty-five performance indicators under seven domains of learning. Information from the checklist is used to determine each child’s performance in the seven domains and is reported on the Georgia Pre-K Progress Report.

6. Parent/guardian conferences are held at least two times per year at which time the Georgia Pre-K Progress Report is shared with parents. While frequent communication between parents and teachers is important, twice during the school year parents will be asked to attend a conference to discuss their child’s performance. Teachers will provide information about the child’s performance in language/literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, social/emotional development, health and physical development, and creative expression. Comments are written to parents that explain the rating in each domain. They also highlight each child’s strengths and areas for growth. During the conference, teachers share strategies that parents can use at home to address areas of concern and to build on children’s strengths.

